



ONDCP

June 1999

Drug Policy Information Clearinghouse FACT SHEET

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http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov

1-800-666-3332

Drug Use Trends

The Drug Policy Information Clearinghouse has prepared this fact sheet to summarize drug use trends in the United States. Populations covered in this fact sheet include the general household population, students, active military personnel, and criminal offenders, as surveyed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the U.S. Department of Justice. Some individuals, such as homeless people, are difficult to reach using standard survey techniques; thus, little is known about their drug use. For information on survey methodologies, please refer to the document sources listed on pages 5 and 6. The data used to prepare figures are presented at the end of the report.

General Population

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have sponsored several national surveys to track drug use trends. One of the most widely known is the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA), which interviews persons age 12 and older living in households. In 1991, the survey was expanded to include civilians living on military installations and persons living in college dormitories and homeless shelters. Since October 1, 1992, the survey has been sponsored by SAMHSA. Earlier surveys were sponsored by NIDA. According

Age of respondent and	Year Year										
recency of drug use	1979	1985	1988	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
12–17											
Ever	31.8%	27.4%	22.8%	20.9%	18.4%	15.1%	16.4%	20.3%	22.2%	22.1%	23.7%
Past year	24.3	20.7	14.9	14.1	13.1	10.4	11.9	15.5	18.0	16.7	18.8
Past 30 days	16.3	13.2	8.1	7.1	5.8	5.3	5.7	8.2	10.9	9.0	11.4
18–25											
Ever	69.0%	62.9%	58.1%	54.9%	53.9%	50.9%	50.2%	46.3%	45.8%	48.0%	45.4%
Past year	45.5	37.4	29.1	26.1	26.6	24.1	24.2	24.6	25.5	26.8	25.3
Past 30 days	38.0	25.3	17.9	15.0	15.4	13.1	13.6	13.3	14.2	15.6	14.7
26-34											
Ever	49.0%	59.5%	61.2%	59.8%	58.9%	57.9%	58.2%	56.1%	54.8%	53.1%	50.8%
Past year	23.0	26.2	19.1	18.4	15.5	15.4	14.6	14.8	14.6	14.6	14.3
Past 30 days	20.8	23.1	14.7	10.9	10.0	11.4	9.5	8.5	8.3	8.4	7.4
35 and older											
Ever	11.8%	18.1%	20.0%	22.5%	23.7%	24.4%	26.1%	27.7%	27.9%	29.0%	31.5%
Past year	3.9	5.5	5.1	5.2	5.5	4.4	5.5	5.7	5.0	5.3	6.1
Past 30 days	2.8	3.9	2.3	3.1	3.4	2.5	3.0	3.2	2.8	2.9	3.6
All ages 12 and older	•										
Ever	31.3%	34.4%	34.0%	34.2%	34.1%	33.3%	34.2%	34.4%	34.2%	34.8%	35.6%
Past year	17.5	16.3	12.4	11.7	11.1	9.7	10.3	10.8	10.7	10.8	11.2
Past 30 days	14.1	12.1	7.7	6.7	6.6	5.8	5.9	6.0	6.1	6.1	6.4

Note: Any illicit drug use includes use of marijuana, cocaine, hallucinogens, inhalants, heroin, or nonmedical use of sedatives, tranquilizers, stimulants, or analgesics. Prior to 1979, data were not totaled for overall drug use and instead were published by specific drug type only.

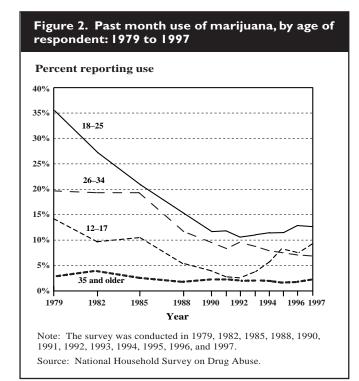
Estimates for 1979 through 1993 may differ from estimates for these survey years that were published in other NHSDA reports. The estimates shown here for 1979 through 1993 have been adjusted to improve their comparability with estimates based on the new version of the NHSDA instrument that was fielded in 1994 and subsequent NHSDAs.

Source: National Household Survey on Drug Abuse.

to NHSDA, the number of current illicit drug users did not change significantly between 1996 and 1997 (table 1). In 1997, 6.4% (13.9 million persons) of the population age 12 and older reported using an illicit drug during the past month, down from 14.1% (25.4 million persons) of the population age 12 and older in 1979.

In 1997, an estimated 0.7% (1.5 million persons) of the population age 12 and older reported using cocaine, including crack, at least once in the past month.

Figure 1. Past month use of cocaine, by age of respondent: 1979 to 1997 Percent reporting use 10% 18-25 8% 6% 4% 35 and older 1985 1988 1990 1992 1994 1982 Note: The survey was conducted in 1979, 1982, 1985, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, and 1997. Source: National Household Survey on Drug Abuse.



Such use peaked in:

- ◆ 1982 for 12- to 17-year-olds at 1.9%
- ♦ 1979 for 18- to 25-year-olds at 9.9%
- 1985 for 26- to 34-year-olds at 6.3% (figure 1).

Overall, no significant increase has occurred in reporting current use of cocaine, including crack, since 1991.

In 1997, the percentage of Americans reporting use of marijuana at least once in the past month was 5.1% (11.1 million persons) of the population age 12 and older, which was statistically unchanged from 1996. Reported use of marijuana in the past month peaked in 1979 for 12- to 17-year-olds at 14.2% and for 18- to 25-year-olds at 35.6%. Past month marijuana use by persons age 26 to 34 peaked in 1979 at 19.7% (figure 2).

Youth

Another major survey tracking illicit drug use trends is the Monitoring the Future Study (also known as the High School Senior Survey). When this annual NIDA-sponsored survey began in 1975, 30.7% of high school seniors surveyed reported that they had used some type of illicit drug in the previous month. This figure declined gradually to 14.4% in 1992, but increased to 25.6% in 1998 (figure 3). Similarly, past month drug use increased from 5.7% in 1991 to 12.1% in 1998 for 8th graders and from 11.6% in 1991 to 21.5% in 1998 for 10th graders (table 2).

The increase in the use of marijuana has been especially pronounced. Between 1991 and 1998, past month use of marijuana increased from:

- ◆ 13.8% to 22.8% among high school seniors (figure 4)
- ♦ 8.7% to 18.7% among 10th graders (table 2)
- ♦ 3.2% to 9.7% among 8th graders (table 2).

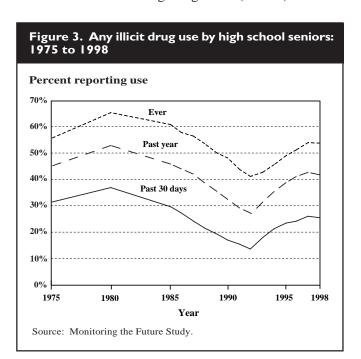
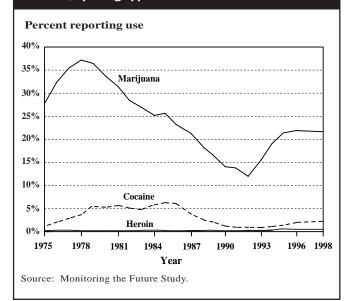


Figure 4. Past month drug use by high school seniors, by drug type: 1975 to 1998



Reported use of marijuana by high school seniors during the past month peaked in 1978 at 37.1% and declined to its lowest level in 1992 at 11.9% (figure 4).

Reported use of cocaine by high school seniors within the past month peaked in 1985 at 6.7%, up from 1.9% in 1975 at the survey's inception. Cocaine use declined to a low of 1.3% in 1992 and 1993. In 1998, past month cocaine use was 2.4% among high school seniors (figure 4).

Researchers, noting the emergence of crack, included it in the survey in 1986 as a separate question. In 1987, 1.3% of high school seniors reported using crack at least once within the past month. In 1998, 1.0% reported using crack at least once during the past month.

Between 1995 and 1998, the use of inhalants declined after 4 years of steadily increased use. Among 8th graders, 4.8% reported past month use of inhalants, a rate higher than the 2.9% reported by 10th graders and the 2.3% reported by 12th graders.

Military

The U.S. Department of Defense Survey of Health-Related Behavior Among Military Personnel examines the drug use rates among those in the armed forces. In 1980, 27.6% of military respondents polled answered that they used an illegal drug within the past month. This proportion fell to 2.7% in 1998 (figure 5).

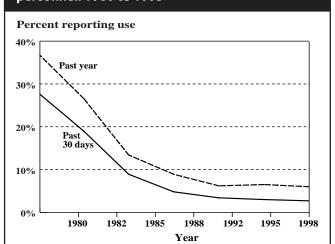
Criminal Offender Populations

Drug use by prison inmates prior to incarceration increased between 1991 and 1997, according to findings from the 1997 Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities. The percentage of inmates

Table 2. Past month drug use by 8th and 10th graders: 1991, 1997, and 1998

	Pe	rcent re	porting	g use	
8th graders			10th graders		
1991	1997	1998	1991	1997	1998
5.7%	12.9%	12.1%	11.6%	23.0%	21.5%
3.2	10.2	9.7	8.7	20.5	18.7
4.4	5.6	4.8	2.7	3.0	2.9
0.6	1.5	1.1	1.5	2.8	2.7
0.3	0.7	0.7	0.4	1.2	1.4
0.5	1.1	1.4	0.7	2.0	2.1
0.3	0.7	0.9	0.3	0.9	1.1
0.5	0.8	1.0	0.6	1.6	1.8
0.3	0.6	0.6	0.2	0.6	0.7
2.6	3.8	3.3	3.3	5.1	5.1
0.4	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.6
	5.7% 3.2 4.4 0.6 0.3 0.5 0.3 0.5 0.3 2.6	8th grad 1991 1997 5.7% 12.9% 3.2 10.2 4.4 5.6 0.6 1.5 0.3 0.7 0.5 1.1 0.3 0.7 0.5 0.8 0.3 0.6 2.6 3.8	8th graders 1991 1997 1998 5.7% 12.9% 12.1% 3.2 10.2 9.7 4.4 5.6 4.8 0.6 1.5 1.1 0.3 0.7 0.7 0.5 1.1 1.4 0.3 0.7 0.9 0.5 0.8 1.0 0.3 0.6 0.6 2.6 3.8 3.3	8th graders 10th 1991 1997 1998 1991 5.7% 12.9% 12.1% 11.6% 3.2 10.2 9.7 8.7 4.4 5.6 4.8 2.7 0.6 1.5 1.1 1.5 0.3 0.7 0.7 0.4 0.5 1.1 1.4 0.7 0.3 0.7 0.9 0.3 0.5 0.8 1.0 0.6 0.3 0.6 0.6 0.2 2.6 3.8 3.3 3.3	1991 1997 1998 1991 1997 5.7% 12.9% 12.1% 11.6% 23.0% 3.2 10.2 9.7 8.7 20.5 4.4 5.6 4.8 2.7 3.0 0.6 1.5 1.1 1.5 2.8 0.3 0.7 0.7 0.4 1.2 0.5 1.1 1.4 0.7 2.0 0.3 0.7 0.9 0.3 0.9 0.5 0.8 1.0 0.6 1.6 0.3 0.6 0.6 0.2 0.6 2.6 3.8 3.3 3.3 5.1

Figure 5. Drug use by armed forces enlisted personnel: 1980 to 1995



Note: The survey was conducted in 1980, 1982, 1985, 1988, 1992, and 1995. Source: 1995 Department of Defense Survey of Health-Related Behavior Among Military Personnel.

reporting any drug use in the month before the offense increased from 50% in 1991 to 57% in 1997 (table 3). However, the percentage of inmates using cocaine or crack in the month before the offense remained stable at 25% from 1991 to 1997, while the percentage using marijuana increased from 32% in 1991 to 39% in 1997.

To benefit more communities throughout the country and enhance understanding of national drug use trends, the National Institute of Justice has expanded and reengineered the Drug Use Forecasting program and renamed it the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) program. ADAM has a network of 23 research sites in select U.S. cities that will be expanded to 75 by fiscal year 2000. In order to monitor trends beyond the central cities, each ADAM site annually collects outreach data

Table 3. Prior drug use by State prison inmates: 1991 and 1997

	Percent of State prison inmates who used drugs:					
		month e offense	at the time of the offense			
Type of drug	1991	1997	1991	1997		
Any drug	50%	57%	31%	32%		
Marijuana	32	39	11	15		
Cocaine/crack	25	25	14	15		
Heroin/opiates	10	9	6	6		
Barbiturates	4	5	1	2		
Stimulants	7	9	3	4		
Hallucinogens	4	4	2	2		

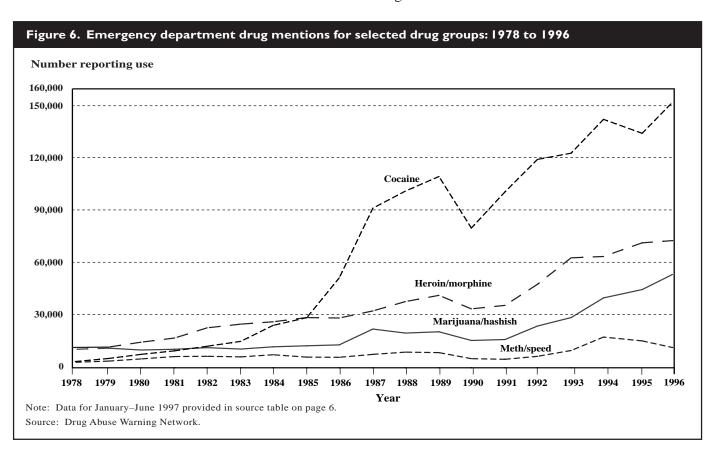
in suburban, rural, Native American, or other communities. It is anticipated that ADAM will be fully operational by fiscal year 2001.

Trends in drug use among arrestees vary by drug type. In 1997, older arrestees (age 36 and older) tested positive for cocaine at 2 to 10 times the rate of younger arrestees. The contrast is most extreme in Detroit and Washington, D.C., where about 5% of young arrestees (ages 15–20) tested positive for cocaine, compared to approximately 50% of older arrestees. Crack cocaine use generally decreased in many cities; the decline was most pronounced in cities in the Northeast and large

west coast cities. Methamphetamine use was evident primarily among arrestees in ADAM cities in the Western and Southwestern States. Marijuana use among arrestees was disproportionately concentrated among young arrestees. However, 1997 data show that the recent expansion of marijuana use among young arrestees had leveled off and in some cities decreased noticeably. A decrease in the number of positive marijuana tests was reported for adult males under 21 years of age in 15 sites, including 6 where the decrease was 5% or more.

In 9 of 23 ADAM sites, the percentages of both male and female arrestees who tested positive for at least one drug at the time of arrest in 1997 remained the same or decreased slightly from rates reported in 1996. The positive test rate for at least one drug increased 5 to 6 percentage points for male arrestees in Phoenix, Portland, and Fort Lauderdale. In Portland, New Orleans, Birmingham, and San Diego, the percentage of female arrestees who tested positive for any drug increased from 5 to 11 percentage points.

In 1997, the percentage of male arrestees testing positive for any drug at the time of arrest ranged from 51.4% in San Jose to 80.3% in Chicago; for females the range was from 37.6% in San Antonio to 80.5% in Manhattan. In 1988, the percentage of male arrestees testing positive for any drug ranged from 54% in Indianapolis and Kansas City to 83% in New York; for females the range was from 44% in St. Louis to 81% in Detroit.



Emergency Department Data

Since October 1, 1992, SAMHSA has sponsored the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN). Earlier surveys were sponsored by the Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Department of Justice, and then by NIDA. Although this indicator of drug use consequences began in the early 1970s, nationally representative data are currently available only for 1978 through 1996.

The number of drug-related emergency department episodes increased from 323,100 in 1978 to an all-time high of 518,521 in 1994. Between 1994 and 1996, drug-related emergency department episodes decreased by 1% (from 518,521 to 514,347). In the first half of 1997, cocaine-related episodes comprised 30% (80,018) of all emergency department drug-related episodes. Cocaine-related episodes in the first half of 1997 were at their highest level since the DAWN survey began in 1978. Between 1990 and 1996, marijuana/hashish-related episodes more than tripled (from 15,706 to 53,789) (figure 6). During that same period, the number of heroin-related episodes more than doubled (from 33,884 to 73,846).

Sources

U.S. Department of Justice

Bureau of Justice Statistics

Drugs and Jail Inmates, 1989 (BJS Special Report) NCJ–130836, August 1991.

Substance Abuse and Treatment, State and Federal Prisoners, 1997, NCJ-172871, December 1998.

National Institute of Justice

1997 Annual Report on Adult and Juvenile Arrestees, NCJ–171672, July 1998.

http://www.adam-nij-net/adam/index.htm

Drug Use Forecasting 1988 Annual Report, NCJ–122225, March 1990.

http://www.ncjrs.org/drgsuse.htm

Drug Use Forecasting 1995 Annual Report on Adult and Juvenile Arrestees, NCJ–161721, June 1996.

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Drug Use Forecasting 1996 Annual Report on Adult and Juvenile Arrestees, NCJ–165691, June 1997. http://www.ncjrs.org/drgsuse.htm

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

National Institute on Drug Abuse

National Survey Results on Drug Use from the Monitoring the Future Study, 1975–1994, 1996, 1997, and 1998. http://samhsa.gov/oas/nhsda/nhsdafls.htm

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Historical Estimates from the Drug Abuse Warning Network: Advance Report No. 16, August 1996.

Source Data

Data for figure 1. Past month use of cocaine, by age of respondent: 1979 to 1997

		Percent reporting use						
Year	12–17	18-25	26-34	35 and older				
1979	1.5%	9.9%	3.0%	0.2%				
1982	1.9	7.0	3.5	0.5				
1985	1.5	8.1	6.3	0.5				
1988	1.2	4.8	2.8	0.4				
1990	0.6	2.3	1.9	0.2				
1991	0.4	2.2	1.9	0.5				
1992	0.3	2.0	1.5	0.2				
1993	0.4	1.6	1.0	0.4				
1994	0.3	1.2	1.3	0.4				
1995	0.8	1.3	1.2	0.4				
1996	0.6	2.0	1.5	0.4				
1997	1.0	1.2	0.9	0.5				

Source: Office of Applied Studies, SAMHSA, National Household Survey on Drug Abuse.

Data for figure 2. Past month use of marijuana, by age of respondent: 1979 to 1997

		Percent reporting use						
Year	12–17	18–25	26-34	35 and older				
1979	14.2%	35.6%	19.7%	2.9%				
1982	9.9	27.2	19.0	3.9				
1985	10.2	21.7	19.0	2.6				
1988	5.4	15.3	12.3	1.8				
1990	4.4	12.7	9.5	2.4				
1991	3.6	12.9	7.7	2.6				
1992	3.4	10.9	9.3	2.0				
1993	4.0	11.1	7.5	2.4				
1994	6.0	12.1	6.9	2.3				
1995	8.2	12.0	6.7	1.8				
1996	7.1	13.2	6.3	2.0				
1997	9.4	12.8	6.0	2.6				

Source: Office of Applied Studies, SAMHSA, National Household Survey on Drug Abuse.

Data for figure 3. Any illicit drug use by high school seniors: 1975 to 1998

	Per	Percent reporting use				
Year	Ever	Past year	Past 30 days			
1975	55.2%	45.0%	30.7%			
1980	65.4	53.1	37.2			
1985	60.6	46.3	29.7			
1986	57.6	44.3	27.1			
1987	56.6	41.7	24.7			
1988	53.9	38.5	21.3			
1989	50.9	35.4	19.7			
1990	47.9	32.5	17.2			
1991	44.1	29.4	16.4			
1992	40.7	27.1	14.4			
1993	42.9	31.0	18.3			
1994	45.6	35.8	21.9			
1995	48.4	39.0	23.8			
1996	50.8	40.2	24.6			
1997	54.3	42.4	26.2			
1998	54.1	41.4	25.6			

Note: Data collected 1976–79 and 1981–84 not included in chart. Source: Monitoring the Future Study.

National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Main Findings, 1979, 1982, 1985, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1992 1993, 1994, 1995, and 1996.

http://samhsa.gov/oas/nhsda/nhsdafls.htm

National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Population Estimates, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, and 1997.

http://www.samhsa.gov/OAS/nhsda/nhsdafls.htm.

Preliminary Estimates from the Drug Abuse Warning Network: Advance Report No. 17, August 1996.

Preliminary Results from the 1997 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, August 1998.

Mid-year 1997 Preliminary Emergency Department Data from the Drug Abuse Warning Network, September 1998.

Data for figure 4. Past month drug use by high school seniors, by drug type: 1975 to 1998

	Percent reporting use					
Year	Marijuana	Cocaine	Heroin			
1975	27.1%	1.9%	0.4%			
1978	37.1	3.9	0.3			
1981	31.6	5.8	0.2			
1982	28.5	5.0	0.2			
1983	27.0	4.9	0.2			
1984	25.2	5.8	0.3			
1985	25.7	6.7	0.3			
1986	23.4	6.2	0.2			
1987	21.0	4.3	0.2			
1988	18.0	3.4	0.2			
1989	16.7	2.8	0.3			
1990	14.0	1.9	0.2			
1991	13.8	1.4	0.2			
1992	11.9	1.3	0.3			
1993	15.5	1.3	0.2			
1994	19.0	1.5	0.3			
1995	21.2	1.8	0.6			
1996	21.9	2.0	0.5			
1997	23.7	2.3	0.5			
1998	22.8	2.4	0.5			

Note: Data collected 1976-77 and 1979-80 not included in chart.

Source: Monitoring the Future Study.

Data for figure 5. Drug use by armed forces enlisted personnel: 1980 to 1995

	Percent reporting use			
Year	Past 30 days	Past year		
1980	27.6%	36.7%		
1982	19.0	26.6		
1985	8.9	13.4		
1988	4.8	8.9		
1992	3.4	6.2		
1995	3.0	6.5		
1998	2.7	6.0		

Source: 1998 Department of Defense Survey of Health-Related Behavior Among Military Personnel.

Other Sources

Bray, R.M., et al., 1998 Department of Defense Survey of Health-Related Behavior Among Military Personnel, Research Triangle Institute, May 1998.

University of Michigan, Press release on Monitoring the Future, December 18, 1998.

Data for figure 6. Emergency department drug mentions for selected drug groups, total drug mentions, and total drug episodes: 1978 to 1997*

		Drug						
Year	Cocaine	Heroin/ morphine	Marijuana hashish	/ Meth/ speed	Total drug mentions	Total drug episodes		
1978	3,438	11,666	10,581	3,102	492,356	323,100		
1979	5,347	11,900	11,284	3,845	511,124	329,109		
1980	7,712	14,707	10,218	5,092	502,225	315,624		
1981	9,750	17,112	10,644	6,469	534,828	329,923		
1982	12,370	22,965	11,584	6,596	538,649	330,611		
1983	15,188	25,100	10,765	6,278	510,879	314,616		
1984	24,368	26,449	12,062	7,487	531,049	327,297		
1985	28,827	28,877	12,651	6,135	536,135	334,503		
1986	51,666	28,622	13,171	6,023	550,070	352,477		
1987	91,791	32,696	22,276	7,707	664,554	396,414		
1988	101,578	38,063	19,962	8,992	668,153	403,578		
1989	110,013	41,656	20,703	8,722	713,392	425,904		
1990	80,355	33,884	15,706	5,236	635,460	371,208		
1991	101,189	35,898	16,251	4,887	674,861	393,968		
1992	119,843	48,003	23,997	6,563	751,731	433,493		
1993	123,423	63,232	28,873	9,926	796,762	460,910		
1994	142,878	64,013	40,183	17,665	900,317	518,521		
1995	135,801	70,838	45,271	15,936	901,206	513,633		
1996	152,433	73,846	53,789	11,002	907,561	514,347		
*1997	80,018	36,032	32,867	8,398	479,774	269,036		

^{*} Data available for January-June 1997 only.

Note: Totals include other drugs not specified above. Up to four substances may be mentioned for each emergency department episode; therefore, the total number of drug mentions exceeds the total number of drug episodes.

Source: Drug Abuse Warning Network.

This fact sheet was written by Erin Steiner Broekhuysen of the Drug Policy Information Clearinghouse. Technical review was provided by Janet Greenblatt at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The data presented in this fact sheet are as accurate as the sources from which they were drawn. Responsibility for their selection and presentation rests with the Clearinghouse staff. This Clearinghouse is funded by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy to support drug control policy research. The Clearinghouse is a component of the National Criminal Justice Reference Service. For further information concerning the content of this fact sheet, survey methodology, or other drug policy issues, call:

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